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**Subject:** Even after revisions, Atlantic Coast Pipeline plan still threatens NC rivers, drinking water

# NC POLICY WATCH

Stories & voices  
that **matter.**

## Even after revisions, Atlantic Coast Pipeline plan still threatens NC rivers, drinking water

By [Lisa Sorg](#)

The temperature in Rocky Mount was tipping 100 degrees and the hallway of Nash Community College was hot, as it held hundreds of people lined up to speak on the Atlantic Coast Pipeline. Nothing sounded better than a cold glass of water.

But these days, with contaminants known and unknown flowing from their taps, North Carolinians can no longer take clean water for granted.

Worries about their drinking water, as well as property values and environmental damage, compelled hundreds of people to attend the NC Department of Environmental Quality's two [recent public hearings on water quality and buffer requirements](#) for the Atlantic Coast Pipeline.

Federal documents acknowledge the pipeline, could further harm North Carolina's water quality — and quantity — as contractors drill below or trench riverbeds, flush the pipeline segments with municipal water, and potentially change the flow of groundwater to private drinking water wells, via blasting and digging.

But the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, in its Final Environmental Impact Statement [released on July 21](#), concluded that as long as Duke and Dominion contractors followed the rules — apparently discounting the likelihood of human error and unanticipated problems — permanent impacts to water, wildlife and the welfare of the eastern North Carolina ecosystems could be mitigated.

At the hearings in Rocky Mount and Fayetteville, DEQ representatives said a permit would require Duke and Dominion to maintain existing water quality standards during the life of the pipeline. But people living along its corridor were not assured. The threat of spills, methane leaks and damage from the pipeline's construction and maintenance would be ever-present. "All rivers in eastern North Carolina will be affected," said Dr. John Huffman, a medical oncologist in Rocky Mount. "The entirety of eastern North Carolina will have an eternal risk."

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The 600-mile pipeline, of which 160 miles would traverse North Carolina, would be co-owned by Dominion Energy and Duke Energy. The purpose, the utilities say, would be to increase reliability for Virginia and North Carolina customers. However, this doesn't mean that natural gas would be delivered directly to residents' doorsteps. Once the natural gas leaves the fracking operations in West Virginia, the two utilities would use 79 percent of it to generate electricity at their own respective power plants.

Just nine percent of the natural gas would directly serve residential customers. They could have to pay a

connection fee of at least \$1,000, a cost largely out of reach for low-income North Carolinians. Another nine percent would serve industrial customers, who would also have to pay a hefty connection fee.

And some of the energy, according to the FEIS, would leave the region altogether and be traded on the commodities market. Regardless of where the natural gas ends up, customers would pay for the \$5 billion pipeline through rate hikes on their utility bills. There could be future rate hikes related to the pipeline. If it's built and finished — approximately in 2019 — Duke and Dominion could ask FERC for permission to expand it.

"This is utterly unjustified," said Hope Taylor, executive director of [Clean Water for North Carolina](#). "There is no economic reason to tolerate the risk." [[Read more...](#)]

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